

A Climate of Relaxation

5. Three months ago the threat from Soviet-dominated Afghanistan caused tension in Baluchistan (reftel). We now find the concern has eased, reflecting the setbacks the Soviets and their Khalqi allies suffered in the intervening period. This was one of the conclusions we reached after talks with a cross-section of people in Quetta, Pishin and Chaman September 29 to October 3.

6. Whereas the pre-coup situation in Afghanistan had exacerbated divisions between Baluchistan's two dominant population groups, the Baluchis and Pathans, and between the left and right, the issue now seems less divisive.

7. Pathans told us of their outrage over the killing of Taraki. (They accepted that he had lost his life.) One Pathan explained that, while his people often and with impunity dispatched members of their own families to the grave, they rarely counted the opprobrium attached to killing a respected leader. The Baluchis, for their part, appeared simply to have calculated new odds as a result of the Taraki overthrow and decided that Kabul's wave of the future crested out at sea. The leader of the National Democratic Party in Baluchistan even predicted the break-up of Afghanistan.

8. We also heard from several sources that the so-called progressives, including Pakistan National Party President Ghaus Baksh Bizenjo, had backed off from open support of Kabul. (Overtures that a close associate of Bizenjo made recently to us and the Embassy lend credence to these reports.)

A Continued Caution

9. Not all those with whom we talked, however, were sanguine that Soviet troubles in Afghanistan would tie the USSR's hands. The Home Secretary, Colonel Abdul Rauf Khan, said that, if there was any relaxation of tension about Afghanistan, it was solely because of the passage of time. People have become used to the fact that the Soviets are across the border and believe they have to live with it. He and others thought the Soviets would be active in Baluchistan regardless of their success or failure elsewhere, and he personally regarded Hafeezullah Amin as a greater danger than Taraki. The Home Secretary said that, while Baluchistan is quiet, "invisible money" is flowing to certain elements in the province. Nevertheless, he thought the problem was manageable. Daud Jan, the Khan of Kalat, gave

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us a specific report of arms running. He said that a group of left-wing members of the Marri tribe and foreigners believed to be East Europeans had passed through Sarawan, Jahalawan, and Kalat districts this summer, distributing Kalashnikovs and other weapons, plastic explosives, money and provisions. The travelers were said to have forecast war in the near future between Afghanistan and Pakistan, urging those to whom they gave arms to store them until hostilities and then use them against Pakistani supply lines.

PPP Makes a Dent in Baluchistan

11. Another conclusion from our talks in Baluchistan is that the local bodies elections held there September 27 left the province divided between a resurgent Pakistan People's Party and still-powerful sardars, although some observers claimed that the sardars as an institution actually took a beating.

12. It was generally conceded that the PPP did what it failed to do during Bhutto's life, make a respectable showing in Baluchistan. Even opponents of the PPP said that its members won about 15 percent of the seats. (The PPP itself claimed a doubtful 50 to 60 percent.) The party's most talked-about successes occurred in strongholds of the PNP's top leaders with the PPP taking the majority of the seats in Mekran (Bizenjo's home district) and Lasbella (Attaullah Mengal's).

13. The strength of the sardars was manifest in the lands belonging to the Marri and Bugti tribes, where the people simply refused to allow the polls to take place. In tribal areas where voting did occur, a group of important sardars (Doda Khan Sarakzai, Mabi Bux Zehri, Sheikh Umer, Taj Mohammed Jamali and Nawabzada Sher Ali Khan), who are supporting the Martial Law Administration, took active part, and their nominees won a good number of seats.

14. The real winners of the local bodies elections, however, may be the relative unknowns who defeated established figures or their candidates in virtually every corner of the province. Many of these new faces belong to the PPP. President Zia-ul-Haq can be expected to try to undermine their loyalty by awarding them powers and influence. To avoid this possibility, the PPP is said to have chosen candidates who had suffered at the hands of the MLA.

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15. Several persons remarked that the victory of so many unknown persons was a blow to the sardars as an institution, because in numerous instances tribes voted against their own leaders. The Khen of Kalat said that a new generation of nationalists is emerging, fed up with the failure of the old leadership and prepared to look to outside sources for help. He noted that, in the report of the group traveling through Baluchistan distributing arms, it was significant that the persons with whom the group was in touch were not well-known leftists like "General" Sheroff Marri but low-level tribesmen. He thought the by-passing of the leaders was more dangerous because it would be more difficult for the government to monitor the activities of widely-scattered tribesmen than a few prominent persons.

The Question of Elections ...

16. Zia had visited Quetta just two days before our arrival. He is known to have met publicly and privately with over 50 prominent citizens of the province, mostly as members of the group to whom he made his well-publicized remarks casting doubt on the schedule for the elections (Islamabad 11036). Dubbed "the notables" by local residents, the members of this group were for the most part carefully selected supporters of the MLA. Of 20 allowed to question Zia, 19 called on him to cancel the elections and remain in office.

17. During a confidential conversation with Faisal Iqbal, the editor of the Baluchistan Times, Zia was said by Iqbal to have asked for a reassessment of Baluchistan, with particular emphasis on the attitudes of Bizenjo and Khair Bux Marri. Iqbal concluded that Zia had made a deal with the Marri, citing in support of this hypothesis the fact that the MLA recently gave permission to both Khair Bux Marri and General Sheroff to leave the country. Hashim Chilzei, President of the NDP in Baluchistan, alleged that Zia has also bought off the radical Baluchistan Students Organization. He said that the Federal Intelligence Agency has hired eight members of the BSO and that the provincial government set up an organization one month ago to find jobs for Baluchi students.

18. Whether or not Zia has made any such deals, he appears to have prepared people of Baluchistan psychologically for an announcement postponing or even canceling the elections. Most people with whom we spoke were convinced elections would not take place. They disagreed, however, whether this would lead to confrontation between the province and the MLA.

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... and Confrontation

19. Leaders of the pugnacious Hazara tribe, which makes up a significant part of the population of Quetta, believed that the non-participation of the PPP, MDP and PNP would effectively disenfranchise Baluchistan's voters, so that, if the elections were held with only the present line-up of parties, the people of Baluchistan would rebel. Former Governor Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti said that the people are fed up with martial law and would react violently were an effort made to prolong it. Ghulam Sarwar Khan, a former member of the PPP who was recently elected unopposed to the District Council in Pishin, thought the parties would come out on the streets if elections were not held.

20. Those who thought no confrontation would occur argued that the tribesmen who bore the brunt of the insurgency against Shutto from 1973 to 1977 had suffered enough and were too tired to return to their mountain hideouts. Bugti himself suggested a reason confrontation might not prove successful when he said that the Pakistan National Alliance, which had spear-headed the successful opposition to Shutto in the spring of 1977, would not take to the streets because the overthrow of the MLA would benefit only the PNA's opponent, Shutto's PPP. Mohammed Saleh Nandokhel, a long-time associate of Wali Khan and Deputy Secretary General of the MDP, said that his party would not join other parties in confronting the MLA because the MDP does not oppose Zia, who unlike Shutto had done nothing against the MDP's leaders. Finally, most of our contacts doubted the ability of the PPP to organize an effective protest.

21. We are inclined to agree with those who discount the likelihood of a serious threat to the MLA arising from Baluchistan, because we find their reasons more persuasive than the simple assertions of others that there would be confrontation. We do not mean that no violence would occur, only that the MLA should be able to contain it.

Attitudes toward the U.S.

22. Despite the apparent lessening of tension over Afghanistan, attitudes toward the U.S. remain waspish. As a people, Americans continue to enjoy the friendship and sympathy of the majority of people to whom we spoke. But recent actions by President Carter to project a stronger U.S. presence in the Indian Ocean and the Near East have failed to alter the belief that the U.S. has lost ground in the competition with the USSR. For example,

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the Home Secretary, a tough ex-Colonel charged with responsibility for the security of Baluchistan, criticized the U.S. for not anticipating changes in Afghanistan and Iran and doing something to head them off. He and others remained bitter about U.S. opposition to Pakistan's development of nuclear technology, which they confusedly called peaceful while asking why we did not want Pakistan to have the bomb. Umer Khan Afridi, the provincial Secretary for Planning and Development, was troubled by the instability of the sub-continent and the general sense that the U.S. was indecisive while the USSR was on the offensive. Bughti lectured us on our failure to support allies.

23. Nevertheless, we found that many of the criticisms were based on misinformation and, when presented with the facts, the critics were prepared to accept the possibility they were wrong. There was, for instance, general satisfaction with the U.S. role in the mid-East peace talks, and even a concession that the Palestinian Liberation Organization ought to recognize Israel. And while some thought that the U.S. should help the mujahideen against the regime in Kabul, others agreed that it was wiser not to interfere. About the only specific suggestion we received for U.S. help was from the winner of the District Council seat in Pishin. He urged us to direct our economic assistance to the development of the tribal areas, in order to weaken the appeal the Afghanistan government has with its call for a greater Pakhtunistan. A modest suggestion, from a self-interested source.

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